CHAPTER 2

INTERTEXTUALITY
Intertextuality

Although the term ‘intertextuality’ was coined and systematically introduced into literary theory by Julia Kristeva, the concept of intertextuality was anticipated by certain theorists who preceded Kristeva and whose theoretical concepts went a long way towards shaping Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality. Further, Bakhtin’s dialogism provided the impetus for Kristeva’s theory. Barthes’s concept of the text closely parallels Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality. In this chapter I shall try to explicate what this oft-used (and perhaps scarcely clarified) term actually means and show how Kristeva strikes an amazing balance between Bakhtin on the one hand and Barthes on the other. Finally, I shall try to throw light on the varied ramifications of intertextuality.

It was Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the Swiss linguist, who in his epoch-making Cours de Linguistique Generale (1916) or Course in General Linguistics, a collection of his lectures compiled by his students, provided a new dimension of treating language as a system of linguistic signs. Any linguistic sign is made up of two basic elements: (a) signifier (sound-image) and (b) signified (concept). For example, a linguistic sign like cat comprises the sound-image /kæt/ (here the signifier) and the concept of the animal cat (i.e., the signified). We could have called the
same animal by any other name than 'cat'. In other languages obviously we use other signifiers to denote the same animal (signified). In other words, linguistic signs are arbitrary and become meaningful only in terms of a particular linguistic system at a particular point of time. Saussure introduces the concept of synchronic and diachronic study of language. While synchronic study of language refers to the study of language at a particular point of time, diachronic study involves the study of language in terms of its historical development throughout a period of time. It is out of the available synchronic system of language (la langue) that the specific acts of linguistic performance (parole) takes place. If a linguistic sign is arbitrary, it is also differential. As Saussure puts it:

[...] in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither the ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system.¹

Signs cannot have an independent meaning outside any linguistic system. That is to say, it is only through the relation of a sign with other signs within a linguistic system that a sign derives its meaning.
The Saussurean linguistics laid the foundation of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist theories and revolutionized language in a new direction. The Saussurean concept of the relational nature of meaning anticipates the theories of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, and has led to the theories concerning textuality.

Another important theorist who exerted a powerful influence on Kristeva and whose concept of language conditioned and chiselled Kristeva’s theorizing of the term ‘intertextuality’ is invariably Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975), the Russian theorist. In fact Kristeva’s *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980) in which she introduces the theory of intertextuality was her attempt to transmit the views of Bakhtin to the French-speaking readers. Bakhtin’s views on languages may be found in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: a Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics,* 2 by M. M. Bakhtin & P. N. Medvedev (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1978) and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 3 by M. M. Bakhtin & V. N. Volosinov (Bakhtin/Volosinov, 1986).

Formalism wanted to explore the general ‘literariness’ of literary works, and Saussurean linguistics saw language as a synchronic system. But what both Formalism and Saussurean linguistics failed to realize is
that language is a social construct and that linguistic communication takes place only in specific social situation. Bakhtin/Medvedev therefore emphasized the social specificity of language ignored by Saussure:

Not only the meaning of the utterance but also the very fact of its performance is of historical and social significance, as, in general, is the fact of its realization in the here and now, in given circumstances, at a certain historical moment, under the conditions of the given social situation.

(Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1978:120)

In stark contrast to Saussure, Bakhtin/Volosinov argue that “there is no real moment in time when a synchronic system of language could be constructed” (Bakhtin/Volosinov, 1986:66), simply because language is always in a “ceaseless flow of becoming”. Bakhtin/Volosinov further reacted against Saussure’s emphasis on ‘utterance’ as the object of linguistics:

Linguistics, as Saussure conceives it, cannot have the utterance as its object of study. What constitutes the linguistic element in the utterance are the normatively identical forms of language present in it. Everything else is ‘accessory and random’[...]. language stands in opposition to utterance in the same way as does that which is social to
that which is individual. The utterance, therefore, is considered a thoroughly individual entity.

(Bakhtin/Volosinov, 1986:60-1)

And yet this individual utterance, in spite of being independent and possessing singular meaning and logic (i.e., monologic), emanates from a complex background of previous utterances made in a social context. The meaning and logic of all utterances are entirely conditioned by what has already been said, and as such, all utterances are dialogic in nature. Bakhtin feels that each utterance is addressed to a previous utterance and emphasized the inherent “addressivity” of language. As Bakhtin/Volosinov put it:

Orientation of the word towards the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee.

(Bakhtin/Volosinov, 1986:86)

In an essay on speech genre, included in *Speech and Other Late Essays* (1986) Bakhtin observes:

In reality [...] any utterance, in addition to its own theme, always responds (in the broad sense of the word) in one form
or another to others’ utterances that precede it [...] The utterance is addressed not only to its object, but also to others’ speech about it (93-94).

As Jeremy Hawthorn has so discreetly observed:

[...] a word for Bakhtin is like a garment passed from individual to individual which cannot have the smell of previous owners washed out of it. ⁵

Each word for Bakhtin therefore is ‘contaminated’ in that it has already been used by a set of speakers and has passed through a series of contexts:

The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered. ⁶

Bakhtin enunciated certain terms as ‘heteroglossia’, ‘polyphony’, ‘double-voiced discourse’, etc. in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics and in his seminal essays included in The Dialogic Imagination. These
concepts not only help to complement the term dialogism but enrich our understanding of Bakhtin’s view of language and its intertextual nature.

Bakhtin observes that Dostoevsky creates polyphonic discourse in his novels instead of subordinating all the voices to an omnipotent authorial voice. In such a polyphonic discourse the author’s voice is one of the many voices:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky’s novels. What unfolds in his words is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.⁷

Thus, in a polyphonic novel the authorial voice is counterbalanced by the interplay of other voices which clash and coalesce within the discourse. But we should note that dialogism is not literally the exchange of dialogues between characters in a novel. According to Bakhtin the “dialogic relationships can permeate inside the utterance, even inside the individual word, as long as two voices collide within it dialogically” (Dostoevsky’s Poetics 184). What Bakhtin means by “double-voiced discourse” is the interplay of two disparate voices within the same discourse.
Bakhtin's very concept of word and language as being of dialogic nature fosters the notion of intertextuality. In his seminal essay "Discourse in the Novel" Bakhtin observes:

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value-judgements and accents, and weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (276).

In The Dialogic Imagination Bakhtin holds that "all utterances are hetroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup" (428).

Inspired by the resilience (i.e., flexibility) and the expansion (i.e., opening out) of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, David Lodge in his book After Bakhtin (London: Routledge, 1990) counsels:

Instead of trying desperately to defend the notion that individual utterances, or text, have a fixed, original meaning which it is the business of criticism to recover, we can locate meaning in the dialogic process
of interaction between speaking subjects, between texts and readers, between texts themselves (86).

The Bakhtinian view of language ultimately paved the way for Kristeva's concept of intertextuality put forward particularly in the chapters "The Bounded Text" and "Word Dialogue and Novel" include in her *Desire in Language* (1980). 9

Although Barthes's views on intertextuality chronologically appear later than those of Kristeva, I have deliberately chosen to bring Barthes first because his views on the text bear amazing resemblances to what Kristeva had formulated in her theory. Barthes appears to be clearer and more elaborate in his conception and remains an influential contributor to this theory. Mary Orr in her *Intertextuality: debates & contents* (2003) 10 argues that although Kristeva is acknowledged for coining the term intertextuality, she did not provide a systematic definition of it and assigns the credit to Barthes:

> Indeed it was he (Barthes), not Kristeva, who wrote the definition for intertextuality in the *Encyclopedic Universalis* in 1973 (20).

Lechte 11 endorses a similar view in which Barthes has been prioritized over Kristeva:
Kristeva’s first published work in France is on Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary writings [----] Roland Barthes is not there in the writing, but he is, in part, its precondition. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Barthes is there but only in a displaced form [---] Kristeva will not take up Barthes’ theories as such in her work, but it was Barthes’ writing from *Le Degre zero de l' ecriture* (1953) onward, which opened up the whole terrain for studies in semiotics. Roland Barthes, then, is Kristeva’s Parisian mother, as it were[ ...] (66).

Before coming to Kristeva, it is important to consider the theoretical views of the seminal French critic, Roland Barthes, whose concept of text shows amazing affinities with Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality. Roland Barthes in his essay “Theory of the Text” defines the text in the following way:

> [...] it [the text] is the fabric of the words which are arranged in such a way as to impose a meaning which is stable and as far as possible unique(32).

Barthes deliberately endorses a traditional viewpoint so as to usher it in a new horizon of semiotic approach to language. What Barthes here means
to suggest is the stability and security of sign which is based on the “civilization of the sign”. As Barthes argues:

The notion of text implies that the written message is articulated like the sign: on one side the signifier (the materiality of the letters and of their connection into words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters), and on the other side the signified, a meaning which is at once original, universal, and definitive, determined by the correctness of the signs which carry it. The classical is a sealed unit, whose closure arrests meaning, prevents it from trembling or becoming double, or wandering. The same goes for the classical text: it closes the work, chains it to its letter, rivets it to its signified (33).

Barthes makes an interesting distinction between ‘work’ and ‘text’. While work is the complete objective thing that occupies a space and is therefore physically palpable, the text is a play of signifiers within the work. Thus text is a constituent of work, and is concerned with the linguistic system of signs. As Barthes writes:

A work is a finished object, something computable, which can occupy a physical space (take its place, for example, on the shelves of a library); the text is a methodological field. [...] ‘The work is held in the hand, the text in language’ (39).
Barthes’s concept of the text assimilates Derrida’s theory of *Differance* and Kristeva’s transposition of Bakhtin’s dialogism. Derrida morphed the word *differance* out of two words indicating two actions: to ‘differ’ and to ‘defer’. A signifier, according to Derrida, does not indicate any stable, final signified. A linguistic sign is defined in terms of its difference from other signs, as also what has been deferred to that sign. The meaning of the sign is continually deferred, as it is lost among the list of possible meanings. The sign therefore becomes potentially capable of referring to a number of meanings. The text thus becomes radically plural, a network of ‘traces’ which disrupt, dismantle and defer any conclusive, final stable meaning. The reader’s function is to find out meaning – or to put it more precisely, all the possible meanings – from this network of traces. Derrida’s concept of this disruptive, unstable, nature of text led Barthes to consider his plural concept of text:

The plural of Text depends[ ...] not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the *stereographic plurality* of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric). 13

In 1968 Roland Barthes published his much-discussed essay “The Death of the Author” in which he not only relegated the role of the author to insignificance, but described the inherent intertextual nature of every text:
[... ] a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. 14

According to Barthes, "a text is made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation" and the unity of a text "lies not in its origin but in its destination". In his Image-Music-Text (1977) Barthes uses the very word "intertextual" while explicating the nature of a text. The text is described by Barthes as:

Woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?) antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The *intertextual in which every text is held*, it itself being the *text-between* of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text.(160).

[Emphasis added.]

What is important to note is that intertextuality has nothing to do with source or origin, or even with influence study. Both Kristeva and Barthes have expressed the same view. As Barthes warns us in Image-Music-Text:
[...] to try to find 'sources', the 'influence' of a work is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas (160).

When we go back to Kristeva – the originator of the term intertextuality – we find that her concept of intertextuality is very much independent of influence-study and source-study. As Leon Samuel Roudiez in his "Introduction" to Julia Kristeva's *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* observes:

This French word (*Intertextuality*) was originally introduced by Kristeva and met with immediate success; it has since been much used and abused on both sides of the Atlantic. The concept, however, has been generally misunderstood. It has nothing to do with matters of influence by one writer upon another, or with the sources of a literary work; it does, on the other hand, involve the components of textual system such as the novel for instance. It is defined in *La Revolution du language poetique* as the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position.

[Underlined emphasis added]
She introduced the writings of Bakhtin to the French audience mainly in *Desire in Language*. In the chapter entitled "Word, Dialogue and Novel" Kristeva acknowledges the dynamic dimension introduced by Bakhtin to Structuralism:

 [...] Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure. What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of the ‘literary word’ as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context(65).

Quite evidently, this very comment bespeaks a shift from dialogism to intertextuality, the former paving the way for the latter. Commenting on Bakhtin when she says that the existence of a literary structure is defined in terms of its relation to "another structure" and that the literary word engages in "a dialogue among several writings", we can get the first inkling of her theory of intertextuality. As Kristeva puts it in "Word, Dialogue and Novel":

 [...] any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The
notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double* (66).

In the chapter entitled “The Bounded Text” we find a clearer view of what she had meant by intertextuality:

[... ] the *text* is defined as a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communicative speech, which aims to inform directly, to different kinds of anterior or synchronic utterances. The text is therefore a *productivity*, and this means: first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that *it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another* (36).

[Emphasis added]

In Kristeva’s concept the text is not an isolated, individual object but what we may call a compilation of cultural textuality. Kristeva actually rephrases Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic in terms of an essentially semiotic approach to language. Although Kristeva is
concerned mainly with abstract terms as text and textuality, like Bakhtin she takes the social milieu in consideration because it is out of the social and cultural ethos that a text emerges. A text cannot be divorced from the socio-cultural background from which it evolves. A text therefore incorporates within itself the ideological struggles expressed in society through discourses.

Any utterance for Kristeva, therefore, is an "ideologeme". As Kristeva puts it:

The ideologeme is the intertextual function read as "materialized" at the different structural levels of each text, and which stretches along the entire length of its trajectory, giving it its historical and social co-ordinates. [...] The concept of text as ideologeme determines the very procedure of a semiotics that, by studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history. The ideologeme of a text is the focus where knowing rationality grasps the transformation of utterances (to which the text is irreducible) into a totality (the text) as well as the insertions of this totality into the historical and social text(36-37).

What Kristeva means to suggest is that since texts emerge out of socio-cultural background, the on-going ideological struggles and tensions must
resonate in the very text. Commenting on Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality, Graham Allen so keenly observes:

If intertextuality stands as the ultimate term for the kind of poetic language Kristeva is attempting to describe, then we can see that from its beginning the concept of intertextuality is meant to designate a kind of language which, because of its embodiment of otherness, is against, beyond and resistant to (mono) logic. Such language is socially disruptive, revolutionary even. Intertextuality encompasses that aspect of literary and other kinds of texts which struggles against and subverts reason, the belief in unity of meaning or of the human subject, and which is therefore subversive to all ideas of the logical and the unquestionable.

When Kristeva asserts that the “notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double”, she implies a meaning emerged from within the text itself and a meaning it refers to ‘outside’ the text, i.e. to the larger social background or what she calls ‘the historical and social text’. Kristeva’s criticism of Bakhtin’s theory of language clearly embodies the intertextual process of appropriation and reconstruction. The Bakhtinian insistence on the social and double-voiced nature of language has been accommodated into Kristeva’s semiotic approach. No wonder then what Bakhtin refers to
“double-voiced” and what Barthes later refers to as “Stereographic plurality” (Image- Music Text 159), has been referred to as “double” by Kristeva.

As Kristeva puts it:

Dialogue and ambivalence lead me to conclude that, within the interior space of the text as well as within the space of texts, poetic language is ‘double’ (69).

Thus the Bakhtinian concept of language has been appropriated by Kristeva with a new orientation of intertextual focus.

Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality involves what she calls ‘transposition’. In Revolution in Poetic Language (1984) intertextuality has been realized as “the passage from one sign system to another” and as “an altering of the thetic position – the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one” (59). In the same book she clarifies what she means to suggest by ‘transposition’:

We shall call transposition the signifying process’ ability to pass from one sign system to another, to exchange and permutate them; and representability the specific articulation of the semiotic and the thetic for a sign system.

Transposition plays an essential role here inasmuch as it
implies the abandonment of a former sign system, the passage to a second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new systems with its new representability (60).

John Frow, however, argues in Marxism and Literary History (1986) 17 that in her attempt to assimilate the Bakhtinian dialogism into French Semiotics, Kristeva fails to notice the precise way in which a literary text corresponds to socio-cultural ideological structures. Frow’s concept of intertextuality prioritizes the reader’s interpretive process, inasmuch as each new reading may trigger off new dimensions of intertextual relations:

[...] any particular construction of a new set of intertextual relations is limited and relative – not to a reading subject but to the interpretive grid (the regime of reading) through which both the subject position and the textual relations are constituted [...] (155).

Significantly and interestingly, according to Frow “the text has not only an intertextual relationship to previous texts [...] but also an intertextual relationship to itself as canonized text” (230-31).
Like Frow other critics have challenged Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality and put a parallel view of intertextuality. In Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader Simon Dentith argues that Kristeva’s appropriation of Bakhtin’s dialogism may eclipse the specific literary and social situation in which the dialogic utterances take place:

Kristeva effectively deracinates the signifying process, tearing it out of the dialogic encounter which is its only imaginable context for Bakhtin[...](98).

Clayton and Rothstein in Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History complain of the “vagueness” in Kristeva’s theory “about the relation of the social text to the literary text” (20).

Michael Riffaterre’s concept of intertextuality is anti-referential. Riffaterre refers to what he terms “referential fallacy” and argues that “the text refers not to objects outside of itself, but to an inter-text. The words of the text signify not by referring to things, but by presupposing other texts” (228)(Emphasis added). Interestingly enough, Riffaterre maintains a distinction between intertextuality and what he calls intertext. According to him an inter-text “is a corpus of texts, textual fragments, or text-like segments of the sociolect that shares a lexicon and, to a lesser extent, a syntax with the text we are reading (directly or indirectly) in the form of synonyms, or even conversely, in the form of
antonyms." 21 For any semiotic interpretation what is required is the presupposition of the inter-text, inasmuch as the inter-text, according to Riffaterre, is an aspect of the sociolect rather than a group of texts or even a specific text. Intertextuality or intertextual reading is something else. As Riffaterre puts it:

Intertextual reading is the perception of similar comparabilities from text to text, or it is the assumption that such comparing must be done if there is no intertext at hand wherein to find comparabilities. In the latter case, the text holds clues (such as formal and semantic gaps) to a complementary intertext lying in wait somewhere [...] 22

Another powerful structural theorist to have thrown new light on text and intertextuality is Gerard Genette. Apart from his Figures of Literary Discourse 23, Genette's structuralist poetics hinges on three related works: The Architext (1992) 24, Palimpsests (1997) 25 and Paratexts (1997) 26. In The Architext Genette points out the inherent fallacies of Aristotle's Poetics. Genette believes that Aristotle was not precise in his use of the word 'tragedy' which meant both a facet of a genre and a theme concerning tragic human situation. The fallacy of Aristotle's Poetics then lies in his inability to differentiate between thematic and generic categories.
In *Palimpsests* Genette critiques Aristotle’s *Poetics* with a new orientation:

The subject of poetics is not the text considered in its singularity [...] but the *architext* or, if one prefers, the architextuality of the text [...] the entire set of general or transcendent categories – types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres – from which emerges each singular text(1).

Genette subsumes architextuality within what he calls *transtextuality* or “the textual transcendence of the text” or what he refers to as “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (1.) Genette coins a new term, *metatextuality* to denote the relationship of “commentary” of a text to another text. As Genette puts it:

It (Metatextuality) unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it.

(*Palimpsests* 4)

Whatever be the nomenclature and whoever may be the critic, the basic point of all the theories of intertextuality and its varied ramifications is the fact that a text recalls other texts in terms of
words, phrases, utterances, ideas, motifs, images, characters, action, and so forth. So, taking all these theoretical exegeses on intertextuality into consideration, it becomes absolutely necessary for us to apply them to specific texts.

In fact, the basic objective of this thesis is to bring out the intertextual relationships – in terms of both resonances and dissonances, - between Nathaniel Hawthorne and John Updike. It is on the application of the theory rather than the theory per se on which the interest of my thesis hinges. Therefore, let me conclude with Allen's insistence on the application of the theory which bristles with a host of oppositions and questions:

The important task [...] is not to choose between theorists of intertextuality. It is, rather, to understand that term in its specific historical and cultural manifestations, knowing that any application of it now will itself be an intertextual or transpositional event, [...] Each theorist comes to intertextuality hoping it will provide an informing tool or model for interpretation, but each theorist realizes that, as a concept, intertextuality plunges one into a series of oppositions and questions. Our task is to engage with it as a split, multiple concept, which poses questions and requires
one to engage with them rather than forcing one to produce definite answers. (Intertextuality 58-60.)
Notes and References


   Hereafter all references to this book will be cited as Bakhtin / Volosinov, 1986.


All further references to this book will be cited as *Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

7. M.M. Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics*.


   Hereafter all references to this book will be cited as *Palimpsests*.